

document through a Freedom of Information request.

That, incidentally, was part of a \$1 million deal with the Ketchum public relations firm which was contracted to produce video news releases designed to appear like real news reports.

So there is more to do on this issue than just the Byrd amendment. That is why I say this amendment is modest in itself. It is not, as some would suggest, a big deal. It is a modest amendment that addresses a problem in a very specific way. We really do have more to do dealing with some of the other tentacles—the hiring of public relations firms to the tune of tens of millions of dollars.

We found out in late January the Department of Health and Human Services paid \$21,500 to another syndicated columnist to advocate a \$300 million Presidential proposal encouraging marriage. That contract was not disclosed either.

The list goes on. Fake news. We discovered a while back the White House had allowed a fake journalist, using a fake name, to get a daily clearance to come into the Presidential news conference and daily news briefings and to ask questions. Another part of fake news, I guess, a different tentacle and a different description.

The Byrd amendment is simple on its face. The question is, Do we want fake news being produced with taxpayers' dollars with no disclosure at all; that it is, in fact, propaganda, not news?

I support the Byrd amendment. I hope we will address other parts of this issue at some future time. This amendment is modest enough, and my hope is to engage a majority of the Senate to be supportive of it.

While I have the floor, I might indicate a second time that I intend to offer an amendment that would cease or discontinue funding for the independent counsel who is still active, an independent counsel who was impaneled to investigate the payment of money to a mistress by a former Cabinet official, Mr. Cisneros. That independent counsel has spent now \$21 million over 10 years. The particular Cabinet official admitted the indiscretion. He pled guilty in Federal court and he since left office and has since been pardoned by a President in 2001. Yet the independent counsel investigating this is still investigating it, still spending money.

The most recent report showed this independent counsel spent \$1.26 million in Federal funds over the previous 6 months, which brings it to \$21 million by an independent counsel's office that was launched nearly 10 years ago to investigate a Cabinet official who left the Government very soon thereafter, who then pled guilty, who then was pardoned. In 1995, the independent counsel was named. That was 10 years ago. In 1999, the Cabinet official pled guilty. In 2001, 4 years ago, the Cabinet official was given a Presidential pardon. Yet we have an independent coun-

sel's office that is still spending money.

We ought to shut off that money. I will offer an amendment to do that, telling that independent counsel the money dries up on June 1. Finish your report and leave town—at least if your home is elsewhere—but finish up the report and get off the public payroll after 10 years, 4 years after the subject in question received a Presidential pardon, 6 years after the subject in question pled guilty in court.

Some things need addressing on an urgent basis. This one does. I understand it, too, will not be, perhaps, germane to this bill, but it is one that I hope every Senator would understand we ought to shut down.

With that, I appreciate the amendment offered by Senator BYRD. I am pleased to come over in support of that amendment this afternoon.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. BYRD. I thank the very distinguished Senator for his support and for his statement. It is a very pertinent statement. In the FCC Public Notice 05-84, dated April 13, 2005, on page 2, it says:

This Public Notice is confined to the disclosure obligations required under Section 317 and our rules thereunder, and does not address the recent controversy over when or whether the government is permitted to sponsor VNRs, which is an issue beyond the Commission's jurisdiction.

My amendment is simple and clear. Here is what it says:

None of the funds provided in this Act or any other Act may be used by a Federal agency to produce any prepackaged news story unless the story includes a clear notification to the audience that the story was prepared or funded by that Federal agency.

Mr. President, it does not create confusion, as a Senator said a moment ago. It creates clarity.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I notice that the distinguished Senator from New Jersey is on the floor. He is a cosponsor of this amendment. I assume he is here to talk on the amendment. I was going to try to bring the discussion to a close so we could vote on the amendment or vote in relation to the amendment, but I am happy to withhold because I do not want to cut off anyone who wants to talk on this subject.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I am not sure I heard precisely what the manager was asking. I would help bring this to a close by giving my remarks very quickly. I appreciate the opportunity and thank the Senator from Mississippi.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, I salute my colleague and friend, the Senator from West Virginia. Senator BYRD is someone I greatly respect and admire. I have now been here a long

time, even though, according to the rules, I am a freshman or just above a freshman, maybe a sophomore—I don't think so—but whenever Senator ROBERT C. BYRD speaks, it is always worth listening. And I find more often than not it is very much worth following the idea that the Senator from West Virginia puts forward.

So I am pleased to support the Byrd amendment on propaganda. It is an issue that has disturbed me over time and something I have worked on. The Byrd amendment is an important step toward preventing the Government from delivering messages that are, if I can call them, kind of incognito. They are hidden from identifying as to what they really are. It is a step toward accomplishing a goal that is not clearly defined as being presented as a neutral observer. So we want to stop the spread of covert Government propaganda.

By the way, I want it to be understood that this is not brand new. This is not something that has only happened since this administration took over; it happened in years past.

I was asked the question at a hearing this morning: Well, then why didn't we talk about it in years past? Because there has been a proliferation of these things. As a consequence, I think for all parties but particularly for the American people, it is a good idea to use this opportunity to clear up the situation.

As a result of a request I made with Senator KENNEDY, the Government Accountability Office ruled that fake television news stories, produced by the administration, or produced, period, were illegal propaganda. The fake news accounts that were produced, known as "prepackaged news stories," featured a report by Karen Ryan. The news story extolled the benefits of the new Medicare law and ended with a statement:

This is Karen Ryan, reporting from Washington.

But Karen Ryan is not a reporter. She is a public relations consultant working for a firm hired by the Government. So it is designed to fool people into believing that this news reporter had come on to something really great and wanted to add her view of the efficacy of the program.

Now, that fake news story made its way onto local news shows on 40 television stations across the country. Once again, people thought they were watching news. Americans watched Karen Ryan's report and thought they were hearing the real deal, but what they were watching was Government-produced propaganda.

Think about that for a second. Our Government is sending out news reports to television stations across the country by satellite. Many of these news stations had no way of knowing that the reports were Government propaganda. News stations across the country have run Government news stories without realizing what they had. This is not aimed at the broadcasters; it is aimed at clarifying the